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127 Droeba, 1884-1885; 3. "Ocherk Abkhazskoy mifologii /Sketch of Abkhaz Mythology/," by verovaniya abkhaztsev /Religious Beliefs of the Abkhaz/," by A., in the Sbornik svedenii o kavkazskikh gortsakh, No. V; and 5. "Ekonomicheskoe polozhenie tuzemnago naseleniya Sukhumskago otdiela /The Economic Condition of the Native Population of the Sukhum District/," same author, in the same Sbornik, VI.

M. Dzhanashvili. April 25, 1892, Tiflis.

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Abkhazia and the Abkhaz

The Abkhaz -- His Character -- Robberies, Raids, and Thieving -- Eloquence of the Abkhaz -- Blood Vengeance -- Love of Homeland -- Hospitality, Politeness, and Friendliness -- Honesty -- Values -- Folk Games -- Poetry.

142 The Abkhaz is a mountaineer of medium stature, slender, swarthy, with black hair and eyes. He is fearless, brave, and
● 181 proud, but at the same time capricious and extremely quick-tempered. Besides his inborn giftedness, his beauty, and, in general, the likeable aspects of his character, he also exhibits quite a few negative traits, of which we shall speak below.

579 Since the most ancient times the Abkhaz have been known as the most fearless and daring of robbers. They constantly raided their neighbors, pillaging and ruining them. For that matter, the habit of robbing and raiding is common to all the mountaineers in general. "Without robbery and raids, life is not worth living to a mountaineer," says Sergei Mech in his work. All his poetry, all the beauty of his existence is in this trait of the mountaineer. Only the tiger can be compared to the mountaineer in the suddenness and swiftness of his attack on a sleeping village in the deep, dark night. Going for plunder, the mountaineer is sure that

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574 road in the evening, he immediately greets him, "bziala vahbeit" -- "it is good to see you!" Then he invites the traveler into his house; "Come in and rest, where are you going now? Spend the night in our house, and early in the morning go your way." If the traveler, be he an acquaintance or a stranger, accepts the invitation and puts up at the host's house, he receives a warm reception and is wonderfully well regaled. And if the traveler does not accept the invitation, he replies, "ubeikht" (grow rich, thank you) and continues on his way. The custom of hospitality protects the traveler even from blood-vengeance. Once he is someone's guest, no one has the right to touch him.

•181 888 Along with his hospitality and generosity, the Abkhaz is also courteous, polite, and respectful, especially to older persons. Here are a few examples.

515 516 [264] Before taking any food the Abkhaz usually wash their hands. But the washing is performed in order of seniority, the ablution of the hands beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest of those attending the banquet. The same order is observed in drinking wine. But on such occasions the oldest person does not lag behind either. In the beginning he renounces his right of priority and invites the person next in rank to drink wine or to wash his hands first. This is required by the custom of courtesy and politeness. But, of course, the younger person flatly refuses the honor offered him. Finally, after many mutual compliments and words of persuasion, the first one (the oldest) accepts the invitation after all. Then the same ceremony is gone through between the second and the third, the third and the fourth, and so on, down to the youngest person attending. Furthermore, while the oldest persons are washing their hands, the younger ones are obliged to remain standing. Here again there is ceremony, exhortations for them to sit down, but if those who are urged to do so ignore these exhortations and continue to stand, then the older person considers it improper to

576 wash his hands sitting down, and he also stands up. The question of which of two persons shall first cross the threshold and

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576 enter a house is decided with the same ceremoniousness. Or, for example, when two horsemen meet each other in the forest. If the younger of the two has something to say to the older one, he must dismount and speak while standing on the ground. At that point, the older one urges him to speak without dismounting.

/14/ The language of the Abkhaz also bears witness to their politeness. In conversation they often use such expressions as: "I ask that your sickness will pass on to me," "may I become the victim of your sicknesses," "may I be the victim instead of you," "may I go around the place where you are lying," etc. In keeping with this last expression, an Abkhaz woman, when visiting her sick foster-child or a person she has not seen for a [608] [155] long time, walks three times around him with the words, "utsge mtsuge seizgat," i.e. "may I carry away your sickness, your misfortune."

For every occasion in life, the Abkhaz has a special greeting, in which are expressed his wishes for prosperity, strength, victory, fertility, profit, etc. In this repertoire of various Abkhaz greetings, there are even some which are especially meant for occasions when one meets persons who are going to a horse-race, greetings for the person who is arranging • 181 the races, and so forth. And this is quite understandable and natural for a people such as the Abkhaz, for whom horse and arms constitute the most beloved things, which they have been accustomed to value highly almost from the cradle. The children [565] of members of the upper classes in the very first years of their lives become excellent riders and weapon-bearers. Pistol, [411] dagger, saber, knife, and a whole arsenal of weapons are the [293] constant adornment of every Abkhaz man. For him there is no greater pleasure than to ride armed from head to foot, a burka thrown over him, in the company of his comrades, singing a merry song. Without a horse and arms, life is not worth living to an Abkhaz!

526 Besides horse-races and trick-riding, the following games [541] are worth noting in the life of the Abkhaz: 1. the ball-game, 538 2. arkil-riki, and 3. stone-throwing. The folk-music and folk-poetry of the Abkhaz are extremely meager.

A 142 [751 cont.] is somewhat flattened, the nose short, straight or arched, the color of the face pale brown, and that of the eyes, hair, and beard dark brown to black. Blue eyes and light hair are rare.

A [143] The southern Samurzakhan show admixture with Georgians (Mingrel); they are taller, more powerfully built, and have more delicate features.

C 142 The Cherkess (see Fig. 442) are taller than the Abkhaz, slender, and have broad shoulders and narrow hips. The skull is of medium size and pear-shaped, the nose thin and straight. The face is oval; the hair and eyes are brown. The girls and young women are famous for their beauty.

A 2 ● 181 The Cherkess are proud, vengeful, cunning, insolent, good fighters, indefatigable on horseback and on foot, certain marksmen, and were formerly notorious as savage bandits. The

C 291 142 302 411

Fig. 442. Cherkess (From R. v. Erckert)

A [751 cont.]
181 Abkhaz are similarly endowed, but are distinguished from the former by greater irritability, instability, garrulity, politeness, and, like the Mingrel, are notorious thieves. [Fig. 442 appears here.]

A 101 [621] [619] The Abkhaz now consist of 24 or 25 kin groups or communities; as tribes, the following have been mentioned earlier: the Ubykh between Khamise and Shakhe, the Abadzekh between Pshekups and Byelaya, the Dzhigeth between Shakhe and Mzymta; farther south up to the Bzyb, the Bzubb, up to the Kodor, the true Abkhaz, and in their hinterland the Tsebeldin; up to the Galisga, the Abshav and, bordering on Mingrelia, the Samurzakhan.

A 89 177 [302] Dress. The Abkhaz women wear Cherkess, or nowadays usually European, clothing (see Fig. 443), the men the Cherkess coat (see Fig. 441); they usually shave the head bare.

C 291 A 2 [177] The Cherkess attire for men has spread widely among the Cossacks and [752] [Fig. 443 appears here] through all of Caucasia as far as the lowland Georgians in the south, and the women's attire has been adopted by the neighboring Abkhaz, Karachai, and Osset. The men's costume (see Fig. 442) consists of a short (yana) of white linen or red taffeta, baggy pants, a silk embroidered undergarment with a collar, a long robe (tsié) open at the chest, made of black or gray cloth, with cartridge pockets (khazyr) on the breast, narrow belt strap, leather leggings, sandals of leather or linden bark, cap (papakh) of white or black sheepskin (see Fig. 444), and in addition, for bad weather, a black coat (tsauka, burka) of goat and sheep wool, with a hood (g'etapt) that is draped around in such a manner C 302 that the right arm remains free. They cut their hair off short, leaving only a braided tuft (haidar). Out-of-doors they carry C 411 a dagger (kama, see Fig. 449) on the belt, and from a sword-belt they hang a saber, the blade of which is often Damascus, C Khorassan, Hungarian, or Lezgin work and which is often inlayed [439] with silver or gold on a black background, as are also the studs [495] of the horse's harness and other parts of the armament. This further consists of: pistol (see Fig. 450), flintlock rifle with